



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.: GENERAL

E/ECA/CM.17/26
20 February 1991

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Twelfth meeting of the Technical
Preparatory Committee of the
Whole

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
29 April to 7 May 1991

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Twenty-sixth session of the Commission/
seventeenth meeting of the Conference
of Ministers

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
9 to 13 May 1991

ECA ADVISORY SERVICES:
THE CHALLENGE FOR THE 1990'S

1. The preparation of the fourth United Nations Development Decade has been preceded by system-wide reviews of the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to the momentous changes presently sweeping the world. As a result, a new operational framework is in the process of being established which intends to ensure greater relevance, efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
2. The International Development Strategy for the Decade has singled out the following areas of special priority:
 - a) The eradication of poverty and hunger;
 - b) Human resources and institutional development;
 - c) Population; and
 - d) The environment and food and agriculture.
3. With the launching of this Decade, great hopes are being placed by the international community on the ability of the United Nations to play a critical role in reversing the adverse trends of the 1980s.
4. Projections made by the agencies of the United Nations system, however, suggest that, in the absence of major changes in policies, the coming decade will be much like the previous one. While relatively rapid growth is foreseen for some developing countries, such as those of South-East Asia, the prospect for others, and in particular for those of Africa, is one of continued stagnation. It is for this reason that the United Nations and the international community at large have begun to consider what innovative technical assistance strategies - operational activities - they might adopt to prevent such a situation.
5. ECA is not immune from this process. Over the years, it has had a successful history as a United Nations agency and African organization, as seen by the increasing conviction with which Africa defines and expresses its development objectives and related strategies. ECA has been a potent catalyst in the establishment of the Lagos Plan of Action, the Final Act of Lagos, the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD), and Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER), the Khartoum and Abuja Declarations, and the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP). In adopting APPER in 1985, the African Heads of State and Government underlined the basic necessity of regional co-operation, stating that "the collective effort of member States is the most important weapon for tackling the current economic crisis". The economic recovery, development and transformation of Africa as a region has not only emerged as a topic of priority in international fora, but is also increasingly reflected in the various operational activities for development addressed to African problems.
6. The success of ECA in political and strategic development, however, must be weighed against shortcomings in implementation. The structures of individual African economies have

historically exerted centrifugal forces which counteract attempts at regional and subregional integration. This tendency is being reinforced by discussions in some intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system which suggest that the problems of development can be reduced to national problems; and that regional development is simply a consequence of national development.

7. National development is the first priority of every member State. The economic realities of the African region, however, are such that no country can achieve national development without ensuring co-operation at the regional and subregional levels. The re-establishment of this essential component in Africa's progress is the task presently confronting the Commission.

I. THE PLACE OF REGIONAL COMMISSIONS IN DEVELOPMENT

8. The establishment of ECA and its sister commissions in Asia and Latin America was part of the decentralization process launched within the United Nations in the late 1950s. This process gained much of its momentum from the expansion in the membership of developing countries in the United Nations which was taking place at that time.

9. The General Assembly responded to its changed membership by a series of resolutions adopted with a view to restructuring the economic and social sectors of the Organization in such a way as to making them more responsive to the needs of its new members.

10. General Assembly resolution, aptly entitled "Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system", was adopted on 20 December 1977, and still provides the most comprehensive legislative statement to date of the role of the regional commissions.

Section IV of the Annex of resolution 32/197 specifically addressed the role of the regional commissions as intergovernmental bodies involved in policy-making at the regional level, and in inter-agency co-ordination. Briefly, the regional commissions were to be the

"main general economic and social development centres within the United Nations system for their respective regions, they should exercise

"team leadership and responsibility for co-ordination at the regional level. They may convene periodic meetings, as necessary, for the purpose of improving the co-ordination of the relevant economic and social activities of the United Nations system in their respective regions."

12. Resolution 32/197 also opened the way for the commissions to play a role in the development and implementation of operational activities in the system by stating that

"...the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should take measures to enable (the commissions) to function expeditiously as executing agencies for intersectoral, subregional, regional and interregional projects, and in areas which do not fall within the purview of the sectoral responsibilities of

specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies, other subregional, regional and interregional projects".

13. This directive, hedged around by limitations as it was, came into force early in 1979 when, by its resolution 33/202, also entitled "Restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system", the General Assembly granted the regional commissions executing agency status "in their own right".

14. While the commissions had been left out in Section VI of 32/197, which involved the programming, planning, budgeting and evaluation of United Nations activities, resolution 33/202 also directed the Organization to strengthen co-operation with the commissions in the area of programme planning, and also in research and analysis; and to involve the executive secretaries in the machinery of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), the body which co-ordinates the activities of the secretariats of all entities in the United Nations system. All this was with the purpose of enabling the regional commissions to effectively exercise their responsibilities for co-ordination at the regional level, and to undertake measures to enhance interregional co-operation.

15. Resolution 32/197 also called for the necessary administrative delegation of authority and budget resources to enable the regional commissions to meet these responsibilities, and opened the possibility of redeploying functions and staff from headquarters units to the regional commissions.

II. THE COMMISSIONS TODAY

16. In retrospect, it has become increasingly clear that whatever the intentions of governments in legislating resolution 32/197, their efforts have not led to the desired level of integration of the regional dimension into the United Nations system. Indeed, over the past decade, the process of regionalization, and to a large extent the decentralization process itself, has gone into reverse.

17. The pressure to reduce the executing agency role of the commissions to one where only residual activities are left to them to execute, has increased as funding to the United Nations decreases, and competition among specialized agencies becomes more intense. Despite some relaxation over the past years, central control over recruitment of staff and procurement of equipment continues to affect that operational capacity the commissions still retain.

18. In turn, the other mandate of the commissions, to act as the regional co-ordinating bodies and team leaders of the system, is not respected by agencies of the system, and the unique benefits of geographical location that the regional bodies offer are not utilized.

19. Other directives of the resolutions have also not been observed. Far from the commissions becoming more involved in the programme planning of the system, as directed by 33/202, the regulations and rules governing programme planning were even further centralized through General Assembly resolutions 37/234 and 38/227. Uniformity has thus been

achieved, but at the cost of flexibility: a significant joint programming exercise between the Commission and a subregional intergovernmental organization, for example, could take up to two years to go into effect through the present programme budget mechanism.

20. Under Section VIII of resolution 32/197 which addresses secretariat support services, there has been major organizational growth at the global level, with the establishment of, inter alia, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (CSDHA), the Office of the Law of the Seas, and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) as a specialized agency responsible for the funding of its own operational activities. At the same time, funding and project execution have become concentrated at the centre. The Department for Technical Co-operation and Development (DTCD), which emanated from resolution 32/197 and is located at United Nations headquarters, now has seven to ten times the amount of money to spend in one year on grant-financed activities than have the largest executing organizations among the regional commissions (US\$155,965,000, as against US\$21,292,000 at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific - ESCAP - and US\$16,226,000 at ECA¹).

21. Centralization has its price, and much time is spent within the system in developing new ways to respond flexibly to challenges. Such a challenge has recently appeared in the area of operational activities.

III. GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 44/211 - A NEW TURNING POINT?

22. The challenge to development assistance which occurred in the mid-1980s was precipitated at the political level. Briefly put, some developed countries, frustrated by what they considered to be the negligible impact produced by the billions of dollars spent on assistance over the past forty years, took the position that development was in future to be the responsibility of the developing countries themselves. Certain developing countries, on the other hand, made it clear that, if they were to be responsible for their own development, they should be given a greater say in the planning and execution of development projects carried out within their borders.

23. Major organizations of the system began to look at development strategies which would better integrate their mandated functions with their operational activities, and which would simplify and decentralize their structures. Among the aspects considered were the following:

- a) Recognition of the sole responsibility of developing countries for elaborating national programme frameworks;
- b) Recognition of the diversity of specific country situations;
- c) Rationalization of the analysis that precedes country programming;

¹ Table B-2, A/45/273/Add.4, "Operational activities of the United Nations system", 22 October 1990.

d) Rejection of the project approach, and closer alignment of general development objectives both with the programming process, and the mandates of the individual organizations.

24. When the General Assembly adopted resolution 44/211 of 22 December 1989, entitled "Comprehensive triennial review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system", it sought to extend the decentralization of operational activities introduced by 32/197, although it ignored resolution 33/202 in the process. The essence of the resolution was

"the delegation from headquarters (or regional) level to the country level, of various elements of authority for preparation and approval of operational programmes and projects for development at that country level, and the concomitant strengthening of the system's country-level capacities thereof"²

25. For ECA, this aim fits directly with the objectives of the Lagos Plan of Action. However, while the resolution often alludes to functions which are inherent in the mandate of the regional commissions, such as multidisciplinary approaches, comprehensive planning, etc., it explicitly fails to deal with the regional dimensions of development in two ways:

a) From the viewpoint of the regional commissions, past development assistance has often failed because individual countries did not receive support from their environments---the neighbouring countries, economic blocs, subregional organizations, that could have facilitated their trade, absorbed their products, shared their resources, and begun the first tentative exchanges of people and technology that mark development in its take-off stages. Development among countries of the region was not made mutually self-reinforcing. By concentrating its efforts at the country level, implementation of resolution 44/211 threatens to repeat the mistakes of the past;

b) While plans for the decentralization of United Nations activities proceed apace, they are accompanied by equally strong efforts to centralize control functions (i.e., funding allocations, priority setting, planning, monitoring, and evaluation) at the headquarters of the various organizations involved. If carried through to its ultimate conclusion, the resulting structure will not be an innovative response to today's challenges, but instead will resemble something closer to that of the British empire in the nineteenth century.

26. Implementation of resolution 44/211 has been scheduled over a period of three years (1990-1992). It should be in place by the beginning of the programme cycles established by major funding agencies of the system. This period also coincides with the beginning of the implementation of the next medium-term plan of the United Nations secretariat, and thus with the implementation of the regular programme on "Regional Co-operation in Africa" to be implemented by ECA. The institutional implications for the commissions thus require considerable examination.

² A/45/273/Add.5, para. 6.

27. Follow-up to resolution 44/211 has proven to be highly complex as organizational objectives have become inextricably entangled with the legitimate aspirations of member States, and already the estimated time of implementation has had to be extended.
28. Concerted efforts by the commissions have also resulted in an agreement with the Director-General for International and Economic Co-operation (DG/DIEC) to prepare a study on the regional dimensions of development. The 1990 report of the Director-General to ECOSOC on operational activities for development states (para. 178) that the study will be undertaken by the DG/DIEC in close collaboration with the regional commissions and with other organizations and agencies. Paragraph 179 of the same document states that, in his annual report for 1991, the DG/DIEC will bring to the attention of the General Assembly through ECOSOC the analysis and recommendations on the regional dimensions by CCSQ(OPS), together with his own views in the context of resolutions 32/197 and 44/211.
29. The study now encompasses the regional dimension of the entire United Nations system. It will therefore require the co-operation of all other organizations and agencies to reflect this widened scope. As desirable as such, a broad sweep may appear, however, it is questionable whether the basic point - the need for regional action through regional commissions - will not be diluted in this complex and time-consuming process.
30. ECA has undertaken a review of the implications of the resolution with its sister commissions. A joint position has now emerged which aims at preserving the central role of the commissions at the regional levels, as originally mandated.
31. In particular, the joint position has highlighted significant shortcomings which the commissions see in strategies based on the principles implicit in resolution 44/211. To sum up, these include:
- a) The establishment of a structure in which decentralization to the country level is being negated by increasing centralization of control functions to the level of global headquarters;
 - b) The lack of a linkage between the country approach and regional objectives;
 - c) Absence of any serious consideration of regional aspects in any of the reviews and studies so far commissioned by the system;
 - d) Absence of any similar consideration in the agendas of the co-ordinating intergovernmental bodies of the system with regard to the follow-up of the resolution; and
 - e) Inconsistency between actions being taken, particularly in regard to the operationalization of multidisciplinary teams, and the mandates of the commissions as spelled out in resolution 32/197.

IV. THE CHALLENGE FOR ECA IN THE 1990S

32. Ultimately, the correct choices in United Nations development assistance will depend on how meaningful the decentralization process becomes. It is difficult to see how major decisions on the path of African development can be taken in headquarters located a day's jet flight away from the region.

33. Decentralization as a policy of the United Nations in the 1990s is something to be strongly supported; but an effective response of the United Nations system to the needs of the developing countries need not only be along the lines laid out in resolution 44/211. From three other aspects, the regional commissions are already more advanced in their decentralization strategies than other entities in the system are or can be. These three aspects are:

a) The regional commissions have been geographically decentralized for some thirty years - in the case of ECA, to the subregional level. Their contact with the regions in which they reside is unmatched by any other United Nations entity;

b) The staffing of organizations in the system can be looked upon as a function of their clientele. Recent studies by the Director-General for International and Economic co-operation, which were provided to the 45th session of the General Assembly, show that 78 percent of the staff of the regional commissions in operational activities (the Economic Commissions for Europe and Latin America excluded) are drawn from developing countries. By contrast, the average for the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), which comprises the main funding agencies of the United Nations system is only 48 per cent, a little over half as many³. Decentralization within the system as a mechanism for understanding the needs and aspirations of the developing countries is thus an established fact in the commissions, but is much less so in the entities which are now central to the United Nations' new development assistance strategies;

c) Decentralizing operations to the country level is intended to have an added benefit: the purchasing of project requirements at the local level, which should result in an improvement in indigenous business capacity. Local procurement is constrained by the limits of what can be procured locally. Because of the low level of development in the African region, ECA can give only limited support to indigenous industry. Nevertheless, when there is a chance, the commissions do indeed buy locally. For instance, the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) makes 96 per cent of its procurement in developing countries. The average procurement from developing countries for all the commissions is 40 per cent⁴. The

³ A/45/273/Add.1, page 3.

⁴ A/45/273/Add.4, page 33. An error in the table appears to put ESCAP's procurement in developing countries at 32.54 per cent, instead of 62.54 per cent. This causes a variation of only 7 per cent in the average for all commissions, however, and does not affect the general argument.

global agencies are in a position to buy anywhere in the world, and one would assume that their levels of developing country procurement would therefore be at least as high as the highest regional commission.

34. The figures actually show the reverse. According to the tables provided by the Director-General, the UNDP/OPS-UNFPA-UNICEF group procure only 24 per cent of their requirements in the developing countries, with UNFPA showing a low of 7.98 per cent - one-fifth of regional commission levels.

35. UNFPA policy in the African region illustrates the implications of the problem. At the present time, the intention of the agency is to close down the ECA-executed project on POPIN-AFRICA, a regional capacity-building project in the area of population information dissemination. Pending any new arrangements, the agency will provide major information support to Africa through POPLINE, a database produced and run from the United States of America. There is no doubt that the POPLINE system is technologically efficient. However, the objective of United Nations technical assistance is not production efficiency, but the establishment of self-reliance. The ECA secretariat believes that this shift in emphasis not only diverts operational resources from Africa, but will also make the region even more dependent on high technology imported from the developed countries.

36. In sum, decentralization as a strategy cannot be expected to work unless the headquarters of United Nations operational agencies are relocated to the countries they serve, and the concept of decentralization is internalized into the staffing, procedures and authority structures of the United Nations entities themselves. Such organizational change is a difficult and time-consuming process. It would appear to make sense, therefore, to implement such a strategy through those entities, such as the regional commissions, which have already adopted decentralization as a way of life.

V. REGIONAL STRATEGY IN AFRICA

37. In what areas is it logical to start from a regional approach? In what areas should the United Nations automatically look to the commissions as a focal point for action?

38. Some areas which would define the regional dimensions of development are:

a) The majority of African countries are small, and unlikely to develop self-reliant economies without trade with, and support from, their neighbours. The situation is especially acute for the least-developed, landlocked and island developing countries. Subregional and regional community is an obvious and inevitable goal, and one which is receiving increasing importance with the approaching establishment of the African Economic Community in the 1990s. Technical assistance provided by the funding agencies of the United Nations system could have this as a major objective for development. On the contrary, however, the implementation of resolution 44/211 appears to be following a strategy of achieving African economic community by providing 51 African countries with independent roads to development, as major funding agencies move their increased resources to individual countries, while

decreasing their allocations to regional programmes. What mechanism other than regional integration is expected to move Africa forward?

b) Regional commissions have an important role to play in the international negotiations surrounding the stalemated Uruguay Round, and its subsequent effects on commodity agreements. This is especially an issue at the present time, there is an emerging trend toward the formation of regional trading blocs in Europe, the Americas, and parts of Asia, which threaten to isolate Africa from world markets;

c) Debt and development is another obvious area. In his statement to the last General Assembly, the Special Representative on Debt, Mr. Bettino Craxi referred to the need for systematic action with "the support - for each of the major indebted areas - namely Mediterranean Africa and the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Asia and East Europe - of the regional development banks and other multilateral bodies of regional dimensions...";

d) For ECA, the Special Programme on African Recovery which has now been adopted by the General Assembly as part of the United Nations Medium-term Plan, and the Plan of Action which is to be developed from it, is clearly an area where the Commission will have a dominant role within the region. Africa's unique needs of economic transformation and diversification require special focus on industrialization and technology, subregional food security and self-sufficiency, monetary unions and harmonization of export commodity policies. In no other organization can all these issues be dealt with under the same roof;

e) A distinctive feature of Lome 4 (ACP-EEC fourth ACP-EEC Convention...; provisional text and addendum, 1989) is its emphasis on the need to promote the co-ordination of structural adjustment on a regional basis. By ensuring that different ACP countries or groups are engaged in complementary activities, regional co-ordination avoids the export price problems associated with concerted producer action. It is presently unclear how this regional co-ordination will be implemented, and there is a broker's role needed between the ACP countries and the EEC to avoid the onset of conditionalities in Lome assistance;

f) Multidisciplinary work is not an area, but is a mechanism that the commissions use effectively. As a follow-up to resolution 44/211, certain funding agencies, including UNFPA, have begun to establish multidisciplinary teams unconnected with the existing infrastructure of the United Nations in the region. The legal mandate for the establishment of regional teams outside the mechanisms of the regional commission is questionable, and needs to be clarified. From a purely technical point of view, however, given the already highly specialized nature of population activities, it is also debatable how "multidisciplinary" these teams will be, particularly when compared to those established by ECA. A short description of ECA's new multidisciplinary team follows.

VI. ECA AND THE AFRICAN REGIONAL STRATEGY

39. One of the major challenges confronting ECA is the development of flexible, coherent solutions to problems that affect the entire region, particularly those related to the above dimensions---external debt, structural adjustment, trade in commodities, energy crises, and environmental degradation. These problems are often complex in nature; they have multidimensional implications; and, given the limited size and resources of many of Africa's countries, the co-operation of national sectors, neighbouring countries, and other groupings is often a necessity. The solutions must be long-lasting and must provide policy-makers with comprehensive responses, incorporating all the technical, economic and managerial aspects of the problem.

40. Accordingly, ECA has established a Multidisciplinary Regional Advisory Group (ECA-MRAG), a task force under the direct supervision and the overall leadership of the Executive Secretary. The Group is composed of senior experts, and is charged with strengthening the links between ECA's research and analysis, and their effects on African development. The wide spectrum of professional expertise and wealth of experience in the Group facilitates the process, while also allowing the policy maker to take into account the interdependence that exists among national, subregional and regional programmes and strategies. In pursuit of this, the Group:

- a) Assists countries to translate regionally-agreed policies into practical strategies and programmes;
- b) Provides multisectoral analyses of African needs in the priority areas, and time-bound strategies for achieving the objectives contained in those priorities;
- c) Develops, with member States and subregional economic communities, annual programmes of multidisciplinary technical assistance;
- d) Provides multidisciplinary technical assistance teams to African countries based on those programmes.

41. The composition of the Group varies depending on the problem being tackled. Experts are drawn from the areas of macro-economics; food and agriculture; development finance and debt management; public administration; statistics, and the application of national accounts to development; environment and development; energy development; social and human resource aspects of structural adjustment and transformation; and regional economic co-operation and integration.

42. ECA-MRAG also draws on the skills available in the substantive ECA divisions. These include nearly three hundred sectoral experts with extensive knowledge of Africa and its problems. These experts are organized into more than a dozen major programmes, thus making ECA the foremost multidisciplinary United Nations institution in the region.

43. The Group provides consulting and advisory services exclusively to member States and their intergovernmental organizations. Such services are made available to member States at no cost and can be requested at any time, depending on the work programme of the Group.

44. In providing advice, the Group responds to requests for help on problems that member States and intergovernmental organizations encounter in their efforts to transform their economies. The Group provides the requesting States or organization with a tentative assessment of the problem, a suggested work plan and framework for solving it, and the composition of the advisory team which would have to be involved. Because of the practical approach of the Group, advice is given within a specific time frame, with an agreed objective to be achieved by the end of that time. Where appropriate, the Group provides suggestions regarding possible future programmes of action, investment scenarios, etc.

45. The annual programme of ECA-MRAG is developed after initial consultations with member States, intergovernmental organizations, and other United Nations agencies at annual meetings of the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs), which are located in the five subregions of Africa, and represent the legitimate institutional structure of the United Nations at the subregional level.

VII. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

46. The lack of influence of the commissions over present development policy in the system is in no small way due to the meagre amount of money which is provided for regional action. As the central funding agency for United Nations system operational activities, UNDP funding allocations provide a general indicator of the priority accorded to the commissions. It has to be acknowledged that considerable progress has been made by UNDP over the past years to strengthen the operational capacity of the regional commissions. Within the UNDP regional programme, ECA receives the highest allocation of any organization. However, it should also be recognized that a basic problem lies in the low priority given to regional activity as opposed to country activity in the Governing Council mechanism, and that the present state of regional programmes funded from UNDP is far from having reached a level commensurate with essential requirements.

47. During the fourth programming cycle, FAO received nearly 18 per cent of the overall allocations, and the United Nations (headquarters) received 11 per cent, while ECA led the regional commissions with just 0.97 per cent of the allocation. The average share of the allocation for four commissions (ECA, ECE, ECLAC, and ESCAP) totalled only 0.52 per cent⁵. Even this figure may be regarded as overstated, since "earmarked" money generally exceeds money actually committed by a considerable margin.

48. To obtain some sort of perspective on these figures, it should be pointed out that even a small country such as the Seychelles received US\$23 million for its national indicative

⁵ UNDP Compendium of ongoing projects as of 31 December, 1989 (UNDP/Series A/No.20)

planning figure (IPF); Rwanda received US\$35 million; and Malawi, US\$61 million. Using the last case as an example, therefore, ECA receives half the allocation of one medium-sized country to develop regional community among 51 countries. Much of the problem may be structural. The criteria for apportioning the IPF are mainly limited by the choice of data: gross national product, population growth at the country level, etc., the importance of which in the African context has yet to be challenged relative to subregional and regional factors in structural transformation and integration. Whatever the reasons, however, if these figures are accurate, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the United Nations system is not convinced that regional action is an important factor in development.

VIII. PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED

49. Action among the regional commissions has to be concentrated on two points. The first is the loss of legitimacy of, and respect for, regional mandates, as other agencies unilaterally develop regional programmes. Mandates must be clear and unambiguous with respect to subregional and regional issues in the United Nations system, and the benefits of the regional approach must be re-established in the minds of the international community.

50. The second is the loss of control of the commissions over their sources of funding, as not only specialized agencies, but also funding agencies, ignoring possible conflicts of interest, now become executing agencies.

51. Steps which may be taken, include the following:

a) The mandates provided in resolution 32/197 for the regional commissions should be updated by a new resolution, generated by the Economic and Social Council, and adopted by the General Assembly. Such a resolution would complement resolution 44/211, since it would put forward regional co-operation as an integral part of the United Nations development assistance, in which the commissions have a central role. That role should be explicitly and unambiguously defined;

b) In this respect, the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation could be invited to explore the possibility of convening an ad hoc group of high-level experts during the second half of 1991 to discuss the revision of the mandate of the regional commissions, and to make recommendations to him on the matter. In particular, the role of the commissions as co-ordinating bodies of the system at the regional level should be re-examined;

c) As a part of the implementation of resolution 44/211, agencies of the United Nations system and of the United Nations secretariat involved in technical assistance should be invited to decentralize staff and establish joint units, sections or divisions with the secretariats of the regional commissions. Participation should be meaningful, and should not be limited to a token representation of one outposted officer. The present arrangement between the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and ECA should be a model for such arrangements;

d) The funding mechanisms of the regional commissions should be reviewed. The United Nations system budget is now a finite one, and one that is shrinking in real terms. Those increased pledges which have been made to United Nations funding agencies have not represented an increase in resources to the regional commissions, because of the low priority given to them. The tremendous imbalance between United Nations technical assistance funds provided to headquarters entities and those provided to the commissions should also be reconsidered from the point of view of decentralization. If improvement is not possible under existing institutions, a separate global pledging arrangement should be established for the express purpose of funding regional co-operation.

52. The views of member States on the above issues are therefore invited.